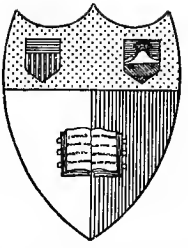
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Shakespeare the Man

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Shakespeare: The Man

Portrait of Shakespeare

By CORNELIUS JANSEN

1610

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEAR.

From an Original Picture by Cornelius Jansen in the Collection of C. Jennens Esq^r

R. Purton, sculp.

Shakespeare the Man

AN
ESSAY
BY
WALTER BAGEHOT

NEW YORK
PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY
McClure Phillips
and Company
ANNO DOMINI MCMI

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A Prefatory Note

Prefatory Note

WRITINGS about Shakespeare and his Works pour forth in an ever-increasing stream; great volumes are made caskets for a few stray biographical items, and these jewels are packed in a superabundant padding of suppositions, studies of his times and remarks (not always stimulating) about his poetry. His sonnets offer as good a field as ever for the exercise of ingenious persons who like superior riddles; and this sort frequently exert themselves therein as independently of any sympathy for poetry as if they toyed with the traditional Chinese puzzle. The people whose Shakesperean comment is of high value must always be few enough,—that is an obvious corollary of the Poet's greatness; sometimes from an actor or an actress has come a flash of comment that should be gratefully remembered; after all, Shakespeare is eminently theatrical, and playhouses and players are invaluable when all detractions have been made, for keeping us in normal relation to the great entertainer, the first mover of hearts. Emerson called him the "World's Master of Revels" in gentle derogation, but perhaps Shakespeare would have accepted the title in a different spirit.

But

But if Shakespeare was the supreme playwright he was also a great deal more, and to his heights and depths how few are there to help us! Coleridge, Lamb, yes; but, among many serviceable commentators those critics are always rare who can fan or fire in our hearts such direct love of a great author, as it is criticism's highest office to foster. Bagehot may well be counted as one of the little group who so serve Shakespeare, though he does so indirectly; his conscious end is to gratify worshippers already sound in the faith with some sure conclusions as to what manner of man Shakespeare was. Here Bagehot stands alone; no one else half so well equipped has ever attempted the same thing. Shakespeare tops his fellow artists of all time because he was so many-sided, such an all-around man; so much we can all dimly see, but to go any further, to sympathetically apprehend such a nature on such data as we possess, — well, we do not get much assistance there from any Dryasdust, busy collecting dates and comparing editions.

Walter Bagehot brought to his biographical essays the psychological insight of a first-class novelist. He watched the play of mind and temperament in the personality of actual men as Meredith or Thackeray observe it in their own creations, and few novelists were ever equipped with a keener comprehension of the mental processes of varied types, or a more enlighteningly humorous mental sympathy; — that is to say, within certain limits, Bagehot had true imagination. In some directions his imagination was strengthened because he did not live the womanish inactive life

usual to artists, but was always in the thick of practical affairs; was a man of business,—as was Shakespeare himself.

It is curious to watch Bagehot's influence widen and deepen, not mainly through the praises of professional critics, but by the slow, sure contagion of enduring private enthusiasm. Only sound enthusiasms endure, and given the suffrages of the elect a man's fame is safe. In such wise Bagehot came early into a goodly measure of his own. But the Bagehot lover sees in his author not one whose audience should be fit and few, but a writer peculiarly equipped to speak to that great body of men who run the world's affairs, whose possession of ability is proven by their power, and who yet find most essayists too remote, too fine-spun;—the men who read their Scott and their Burns and their Shakespeare, but who inevitably pass by Pater, for instance, and who are apt to find even Lamb too bookish, too aloof from the arena of their lives. It is not by coming down that Bagehot stands to enlarge and delight them; it is not his limitations so much as his breadths that appeal to them; he includes such of their own perceptions and understandings as the bookman usually lacks.

The completest edition of Bagehot in the world, the first comprehensive edition of his works ever published, was a curious outcome of practical men's delight in him, and that it is an American edition is another proud fact added to that glorious chronicle of superior appreciations which perhaps begins with the record of our behaviour to "Sartor Resartus" and does not end

end in noting that the first full edition of Meredith's novels came from Boston.

With no over-weening faith in the Democracy of dreams, Bagehot was yet a forerunner of that democratic literature which, along with a flood of print, quite unrelated to literature to be sure, is now slowly making itself felt as a new force, or at least a force growing to novel proportions. It was Bagehot himself who originated the saying, since variously accredited, that the trouble with literature was that "so few people who can write know anything." Democracy in diver's ways tends to set those who know life (which is what he is talking about) to trying to write. In helping them to the art it is hardly so effective; But Bagehot himself was as truly literary as he was thoroughly conversant with the world, and the "faults of his qualities" are trifling. He was built for a robust popularity, and nothing he wrote better sustains that assertion than his essay on "Shakespeare: the Man."

We have all been sorely bored with disquisitions on this theme, heavy papers given up to unfounded inferences and guesses at once shallow and ponderous. Bagehot does not go far in developing hidden details of Shakespeare's external history; he knows human beings and the ways of artists too well to think psychological insight can discover dates from sentiments, or fix the details of a man's love affairs by the style of his verses. But he speaks as one having authority on many personal traits; he is sure of some things; and whoever questions his conclusions (surely Dryasdust

must — incapable as he is of crediting the existence of either a theatrical manager or a poet), the doubters are sure to be fewest among the artists who work in the same elements Shakespeare subdued to his mighty ends, and among the men who are influential in a busy world akin to that the manager of the Globe exploited so profitably.

Viola Roseboro'

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Shakespeare: The Man

Shakespeare: The Man

(1853.)

THE greatest of English poets, it is often said, is but a name. "No letter of his writing, no record of his conversation, no character of him drawn with any fullness by a contemporary" have been extracted by antiquaries from the piles of rubbish which they have sifted. Yet of no person is there a clearer picture in the popular fancy. You seem to have known Shakespeare, to have seen Shakespeare, to have been friends with Shakespeare. We would attempt a slight delineation of the popular idea which has been formed: not from loose tradition or remote research, not from what some one says some one else said that the poet said, but from data which are at least undoubted,—from the sure testimony of his certain works.

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* *Shakespeare et son Temps: Étude Littéraire. Par M. Guizot. 1852.*
Notes and Emendations to the Text of Shakespeare's Plays from early Manuscript Corrections in a Copy of the Folio, 1632, in the possession of R. Payne Collier, Esq., F.S.A. London. 1853.

Some

Some extreme skeptics, we know, doubt whether it is possible to deduce anything as to an author's character from his works. Yet surely people do not keep a tame steam-engine to write their books: and if those books were really written by a man, he must have been a man who could write them; he must have had the thoughts which they express, have acquired the knowledge they contain, have possessed the style in which we read them. The difficulty is a defect of the critics. A person who knows nothing of an author he has read will not know much of an author whom he has seen.

First of all, it may be said that Shakespeare's works could only be produced by a first-rate imagination working on a first-rate experience. It is often difficult to make out whether the author of a poetic creation is drawing from fancy or drawing from experience; but for art on a certain scale the two must concur. Out of nothing nothing can be created. Some plastic power is required, however great may be the material. And when such a work as "Hamlet" or "Othello"—still more, when both of them, and others not unequal—have been created by a single mind, it may be fairly said that not only a great imagination but a full conversancy with the world was necessary to their production. The whole powers of man, under the most favorable circumstances, are not too great for such an effort.

We may assume that Shakespeare had a great experience.

To a great experience one thing is essential—an experiencing nature. It is not enough to have opportunity; it is essential to feel it. Some occasions come to all men; but to many they are of little use, and to some they are none. What, for example, has experience done for the distinguished Frenchman the name of whose essay is prefixed to this paper. M. Guizot is the same man that he was in 1820, or, we believe, as he was in 1814. Take up one of his lectures published before he was a practical statesman: you will be struck with the width of view, the amplitude and the solidity of the reflections; you will be amazed that a mere literary teacher could produce anything so wise; but take up afterwards an essay published since his fall, and you will be amazed to find no more. Napoleon I. is come and gone, the Bourbons of the old *régime* have come and gone, the Bourbons of the new *régime* have had their turn. M. Guizot has been first minister of a citizen king; he has led a great party; he has pronounced many a great *discours* that was well received by the second elective assembly in the world. But there is no trace of this in his writings. No one would guess from them that their author had ever left the professor's chair. It is the same, we are told, with small matters: when M. Guizot walks the street he seems to see nothing; the head is thrown back, the eye fixed, and the mouth working. His mind is no doubt at work, but it is not stirred by what is external. Perhaps it is the internal activity of mind that overmasters the perceptive power. Anyhow,

how, there might have been an *émeute* in the street, and he would not have known it; there have been revolutions in his life, and he is scarcely the wiser. Among the most frivolous and fickle of civilized nations he is alone. They pass from the game of war to the game of peace, from the game of science to the game of art, from the game of liberty to the game of slavery, from the game of slavery to the game of license; he stands like a schoolmaster in the playground, without sport and without pleasure, firm and sullen, slow and awful.

A man of this sort is a curious mental phenomenon. He appears to get early — perhaps to be born with — a kind of dry schedule or catalogue of the universe; he has a ledger in his head, and has a title to which he can refer any transaction; nothing puzzles him, nothing comes amiss to him, but he is not in the least the wiser for anything. Like the book-keeper, he has his heads of account, and he knows them, but he is no wiser for the particular items. After a busy day and after a slow day, after a few entries and after many, his knowledge is exactly the same: take his opinion of Baron Rothschild, he will say, "Yes, he keeps an account with us"; of Humphrey Brown, "Yes, we have that account, too." Just so with the class of minds which we are speaking of, and in greater matters. Very early in life they come to a certain and considerable acquaintance with the world; they learn very quickly all they can learn, and naturally they never in any way learn any more. Mr. Pitt is in this country the type of the character. Mr. Alison,

in a well-known passage,* makes it a matter of wonder that he was fit to be a Chancellor of the Exchequer at twenty-three, and it *is* a great wonder; but it is to be remembered that he was no more fit at forty-three. As somebody said, he did not grow, he was cast. Experience taught him nothing, and he did not believe that he had anything to learn. The habit of mind in smaller degrees is not very rare, and might be illustrated without end. Hazlitt tells a story of West, the painter, that is in point: when some one asked him if he had ever been to Greece, he answered, "No, I have read a descriptive catalogue of the principal objects in that country, and I believe I am as well conversant with them as if I had visited it."† No doubt he was just as well conversant, and so would be any *doctrinaire*.

But Shakespeare was not a man of this sort. If he walked down a street, he knew what was in that street. His mind did not form in early life a classified list of all the objects in the universe, and learn no more about the universe ever after. From a certain fine sensibility of nature, it is plain that he took a keen interest not only in the general and coarse outlines of objects, but in their minutest particulars and gentlest gradations. You may open Shakespeare and find the clearest proofs of this. Take the following: —

* "*History of Europe*," *Vol. II., page 366.*

† *Roughly from "The Old Age of Artists," in the "Plain Speaker"; also note to "A Landscape of Nicolas Poussin," in the "Table Talk."*

"*When,*

"*When last the young Orlando parted from you,*
He left a promise to return again
Within an hour; and pacing through the forest,
Chewing the food of sweet and bitter fancy,
Lo, what befell! he threw his eye aside,
And mark what object did present itself:—
Under an oak, whose boughs were mossed with age
And high top bald with dry antiquity,
A wretched ragged man, o'ergrown with hair,
Lay sleeping on his back: about his neck
A green and gilded snake had wreathed itself,
Who with her head, nimble in threats, approached
The opening of his mouth; but suddenly,
Seeing Orlando, it unlinked itself,
And with indented glides did slip away
Into a bush: under which bush's shade
A lioness, with udders all drawn dry,
Lay crouching, head on ground, with cat-like watch,
When that the sleeping man should stir; for 'tis
The royal disposition of that beast
To prey on nothing that doth seem as dead:
This seen," *etc., etc.**

Or the more celebrated description of the hunt:—

"*And when thou hast on foot the purblind hare,*
Mark the poor wretch, to overshoot his troubles,
How he outruns the wind, and with what care
He cranks and crosses, with a thousand doubles:
The many musits through the which he goes
Are like a labyrinth to amaze his foes.

* "*As You Like it,*" *IV, 3.*

"*Sometime he runs among a flock of sheep,*
To make the cunning hounds mistake their smell,
And sometime where earth-delving conies keep,
To stop the loud pursuers in their yell;
And sometime sorteth with a herd of deer:
Danger deviseth shifts; wit waits on fear:

"*For there his smell with others being mingled,*
The hot scent-snuffing hounds are driven to doubt,
Ceasing their clamorous cry till they have singled,
With much ado, the cold fault cleanly out:
Then do they spend their mouths; Echo replies,
As if another chase were in the skies.

"*By this, poor Wat, far off upon a hill,*
Stands on his hinder legs with listening ear,
To hearken if his foes pursue him still;
Anon their loud alarums he doth hear;
And now his grief may be compared well
To one sore sick that hears the passing-bell.

"*Then shalt thou see the dew-bedabbled wretch*
Turn and return, indenting with the way;
Each envious briar his weary legs doth scratch,
Each shadow makes him stop, each murmur stay:
For misery is trodden on by many,
And being low, never relieved by any." *

It is absurd, by the way, to say we know *nothing* about the man who wrote that: we know that he had been

* "*Venus and Adonis.*"

after

after a hare. It is idle to allege that mere imagination would tell him that a hare is apt to run among a flock of sheep, or that its so doing disconcerts the scent of hounds. But no single citation really represents the power of the argument: set descriptions may be manufactured to order, and it does not follow that even the most accurate or successful of them was really the result of a thorough and habitual knowledge of the object. A man who knows little of nature may write one excellent delineation, as a poor man may have one bright guinea; real opulence consists in having many. What truly indicates excellent knowledge is the habit of constant, sudden, and almost unconscious allusion, which implies familiarity, for it can arise from that alone; and this very species of incidental, casual, and perpetual reference to "the mighty world of eye and ear" * is the particular characteristic of Shakespeare. In this respect Shakespeare had the advantage of one whom, in many points, he much resembled,—Sir Walter Scott. For a great poet, the organization of the latter was very blunt: he had no sense of smell, little sense of taste, almost no ear for music (he knew a few, perhaps three, Scotch tunes, which he avowed that he had learned in sixty years, by hard labor and mental association), and not much turn for the minutiæ of nature in any way. The effect of this may be seen in some of the best descriptive passages of his poetry; and we will not deny that it does (although proceeding from a sensuous defect) in a certain degree add to their popularity. He deals with the main out-

* *Wordsworth*, "*Tintern Abbey*."

lines and great points of nature, never attends to any others, and in this respect he suits the comprehension and knowledge of many who know only those essential and considerable outlines. Young people especially, who like big things, are taken with Scott, and bored by Wordsworth, who knew too much. And after all, the two poets are in proper harmony, each with his own scenery. Of all beautiful scenery the Scotch is the roughest and barest, as the English is the most complex and cultivated. What a difference is there between the minute and finished delicacy of Rydal Water and the rough simplicity of Loch Katrine! It is the beauty of civilization beside the beauty of barbarism. Scott has himself pointed out the effect of this on arts and artists: —

"*Or see yon weather-beaten hind,*
Whose sluggish herds before him wind,
Whose tattered plaid and rugged cheek
His Northern clime and kindred speak;
Through England's laughing meads he goes,
And England's wealth around him flows:
Ask if it would content him well
At ease in those gay plains to dwell,
Where hedgerows spread a verdant screen,
And spires and forests intervene,
And the neat cottage peeps between?
No! not for these would he exchange
His dark Lochaber's boundless range,
Not for fair Devon's meads forsake
Ben Nevis gray and Garry's lake.

"*Thus*

"*Thus while I ape the measure wild*
Of tales that charmed me yet a child,
Rude though they be, still with the chime
Return the thoughts of early time;
And feelings roused in life's first day
Glow in the line and prompt the lay.
Then rise those crags, that mountain tower,
Which charmed my fancy's wakening hour.
Though no broad river swept along,
To claim perchance heroic song;
Though sighed no groves in summer gale,
To prompt of love a softer tale;
Though scarce a puny streamlet's speed
Claimed homage from a shepherd's reed,—
Yet was poetic impulse given
By the green hill and clear blue heaven.
It was a barren scene and wild,
Where naked cliffs were rudely piled,
But ever and anon between
Lay velvet tufts of loveliest green;
And well the lonely infant knew
Recesses where the wall flower grew,
And honeysuckle loved to crawl
Up the low crag and ruined wall.

. . . . .

"*For me, thus nurtured, dost thou ask*
The classic poet's well-conned task?
Nay, Erskine, nay,—on the wild hill
Let the wild heath-bell flourish still;
Cherish the tulip, prune the vine,
But freely let the woodbine twine,
And leave untrimmed the eglantine.

Nay, my friend, nay,—since oft thy praise
Hath given fresh vigor to my lays,
Since oft thy judgment could refine
My flattered thought or cumbrous line,
Still kind, as is thy wont, attend,
And in the minstrel spare the friend.
Though wild as cloud, as stream, as gale,
Flow forth, flow unrestrained, my tale!" *

And this is wise, for there is beauty in the North as well as in the South. Only it is to be remembered that the beauty of the Trosachs is the result of but a few elements,—say birch and brushwood, rough hills and narrow dells, much heather and many stones,—while the beauty of England is one thing in one district and one in another; is here the combination of one set of qualities, and there the harmony of opposite ones, and is everywhere made up of many details and delicate refinements, all which require an exquisite delicacy of perceptive organization, a seeing eye, a minutely hearing ear. Scott's is the strong admiration of a rough mind; Shakespeare's, the nice minuteness of a susceptible one.

A perfectly poetic appreciation of nature contains two elements,—a knowledge of facts and a sensibility to charms. Everybody who may have to speak to some naturalists will be well aware how widely the two may be separated. He will have seen that a man may study butterflies and forget that they are beau-

* "*Marmion*," *Introduction to Canto III.*

tiful,

tiful, or be perfect in the "lunar theory" without knowing what most people mean by the moon. Generally such people prefer the stupid parts of nature, —worms and Cochin-China fowls. But Shakespeare was not obtuse. The lines—

> "*Daffodils,*
> *That come before the swallow dares, and take*
> *The winds of March with beauty; violets dim,*
> *But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes*
> *Or Cytherea's breath,*" *

seem to show that he knew those feelings of youth to which beauty is more than a religion.

In his mode of delineating natural objects, Shakespeare is curiously opposed to Milton. The latter, who was still by temperament and a schoolmaster by trade, selects a beautiful object, puts it straight out before him and his readers, and accumulates upon it all the learned imagery of a thousand years; Shakespeare glances at it and says something of his own. It is not our intention to say that as a describer of the external world, Milton is inferior; in *set* description we rather think that he is the better. We only wish to contrast the mode in which the delineation is effected. The one is like an artist who dashes off any number of picturesque sketches at any moment; the other like a man who has lived at Rome, has undergone a thorough training, and by deliberate and conscious effort, after a long study of

* "*Winter's Tale,*" *IV, 3.*

the best masters, can produce a few great pictures. Milton, accordingly, as has been often remarked, is careful in the choice of his subjects,—he knows too well the value of his labor to be very ready to squander it; Shakespeare, on the contrary, describes anything that comes to hand, for he is prepared for it whatever it may be, and what he paints he paints without effort. Compare any passage from Shakespeare—for example, those quoted before—and the following passage from Milton:—

"*Southward through Eden went a river large,*
Nor changed its course, but through the shaggy hill
Passed underneath ingulfed,—for God had thrown
That mountain as his garden mold, high raised
Upon the rapid current, which, through veins
Of porous earth with kindly thirst updrawn,
Rose a fresh fountain, and with many a rill
Watered the garden; thence united fell
Down the steep glade, and met the nether flood,
Which from its darksome passage now appears;
And now divided into four main streams
Runs diverse, wandering many a famous realm
And country, whereof here needs no account:
But rather to tell how,—if art could tell,—
How from that sapphire fount the crispèd brooks,
Rolling on orient pearl and sands of gold,
With mazy error under pendant shades
Ran nectar, visiting each plant; and fed
Flowers worthy of Paradise, which not nice art
In beds and curious knots, but nature boon

Poured

Poured forth profuse on hill and dale and plain,
Both where the morning sun first warmly smote
The open field, and where the unpierced shade
Imbrowned the noontide bowers. Thus was this place
A happy rural seat of various view:
Groves whose rich trees wept odorous gums and balm;
Others whose fruit, burnished with golden rind
Hung amiable (Hesperian fables true,
If true, here only), and of delicious taste;
Betwixt them lawns or level downs, and flocks
Grazing the tender herb, were interposed,
Or palmy hillock, or the flowery lap
Of some irriguous valley spread her store;
Flowers of all hue, and without thorn the rose." *

Why, you could draw a map of it. It is *not* "nature boon," but "nice art in beds and curious knots"; it is exactly the old (and excellent) style of artificial gardening, by which any place can be turned into trim hedge-rows, and stiff borders, and comfortable shades: but there are no straight lines in nature or Shakespeare. Perhaps the contrast may be accounted for by the way in which the two poets acquired their knowledge of scenes and scenery. We think we demonstrated before that Shakespeare was a sportsman; but if there be still a skeptic or a dissentient, let him read the following remarks on dogs:—

"*My hounds are bred out of the Spartan kind,*
So flewed, so sanded; and their heads are hung
With ears that sweep away the morning dew;

* "*Paradise Lost*," *Book IV.*

Crook-kneed, and dewlapped like Thessalian bulls;
Slow in pursuit, but matched in mouth like bells,
Each under each. A cry more tunable
Was never holla'd to nor cheered with horn
In Crete, in Sparta, nor in Thessaly." *

"Judge when you hear."† It is evident that the man who wrote this was a judge of dogs, was an out-of-door sporting man, full of natural sensibility, not defective in "daintiness of ear," and above all things, apt to cast on nature random, sportive, half-boyish glances, which reveal so much and bequeath such abiding knowledge. Milton, on the contrary, went out to see nature. He left a narrow cell, and the intense study which was his "portion in this life," to take a slow, careful, and reflective walk. In his treatise on education he has given us his notion of the way in which young people should be familiarized with natural objects. "But," he remarks, "to return to our own institute: besides these constant exercises at home, there is another opportunity of gaining experience to be won from pleasure itself abroad. In those vernal seasons of the year when the air is calm and pleasant, it were an injury and sullenness against nature not to go out and see her riches, and partake in her rejoicing with heaven and earth. I should not therefore be a persuader to them of studying much then, after two or

* "*Midsummer Night's Dream*," *IV*, *I*.
†*Line immediately following verse above.*

three

three years that they have well laid their grounds, but to ride out in companies with prudent and staid guides, to all the quarters of the land: learning and observing all places of strength, all commodities of building and of soil, for towns and tillage, harbors and ports for trade; sometimes taking sea as far as to our navy, to learn there also what they can in the practical knowledge of sailing and of sea-fight." Fancy the "prudent and staid guides." What a machinery for making pedants! Perhaps Shakespeare would have known that the conversation would be in this sort: "I say, Shallow, that mare is going in the knees. She has never been the same since you larked her over the fivebar, while Moleyes was talking clay and agriculture. I do not hate Latin so much, but I hate 'argillaceous earth'; and what use is *that* to a fellow in the Guards, *I* should like to know?" Shakespeare had himself this sort of boyish buoyancy; he was not one of the "staid guides." We might further illustrate it, yet this would be tedious enough; and we prefer to go on and show what we mean by an experiencing nature in relation to men and women, just as we have striven to indicate what it is in relation to horses and hares.

The reason why so few good books are written is that so few people that can write know anything. In general an author has always lived in a room, has read books, has cultivated science, is acquainted with the style and sentiments of the best authors, but he is out of the way of employing his own eyes

and ears. He has nothing to hear and nothing to see. His life is a vacuum. The mental habits of Robert Southey, which about a year ago were so extensively praised in the public journals, are the type of literary existence, just as the praise bestowed on them shows the admiration excited by them among literary people. He wrote poetry (as if anybody could) before breakfast; he read during breakfast. He wrote history until dinner; he corrected proof-sheets between dinner and tea; he wrote an essay for the *Quarterly* afterwards; and after supper, by way of relaxation, composed "The Doctor"—a lengthy and elaborate jest. Now, what can any one think of such a life?—except how clearly it shows that the habits best fitted for communicating information, formed with the best care, and daily regulated by the best motives, are exactly the habits which are likely to afford a man the least information to communicate. Southey had no events, no experiences. His wife kept house and allowed him pocket money, just as if he had been a German professor devoted to accents, tobacco, and the dates of Horace's amours. And it is pitiable to think that so meritorious a life was only made endurable by a painful delusion. He thought that day by day, and hour by hour, he was accumulating stores for the instruction and entertainment of a long posterity. His epics were to be in the hands of all men, and his history of Brazil the "Herodotus of the South American Republics"; as if his epics were not already dead, and as if the people who now cheat

cheat at Valparaiso care a *real* who it was that cheated those before them. Yet it was only by a conviction like this that an industrious and caligraphic man (for such was Robert Southey), who might have earned money as a clerk, worked all his days for half a clerk's wages, at occupation much duller and more laborious. The critic in the "Vicar of Wakefield" lays down that you should *always* say that the picture would have been better if the painter had taken more pains; but, in the case of the practiced literary man, you should often enough say that the writings would have been much better if the writer had taken less pains. He says he has devoted his life to the subject; the reply is, "Then you have taken the best way to prevent your making anything of it. Instead of reading studiously what Burgersdicius and Ænesidemus said men were, you should have gone out yourself and seen (if you can see) what they are."

After all, the original way of writing books may turn out to be the best. The first author, it is plain, could not have taken anything from books, since there were no books for him to copy from; he looked at things for himself. Anyhow the modern system fails, for where are the amusing books from voracious students and habitual writers? Not that we mean exactly to say that an author's hard reading is the cause of his writing that which is hard to read. This would be near the truth, but not quite the truth. The two are concomitant effects of a certain defective nature. Slow men read well, but write ill. The abstracted

habit, the want of keen exterior interests, the aloofness of mind from what is next it, all tend to make a man feel an exciting curiosity and interest about remote literary events, the toils of scholastic logicians, and the petty feuds of Argos and Lacedæmon; but they also tend to make a man very unable to explain and elucidate those exploits for the benefit of his fellows. What separates the author from his readers will make it proportionably difficult for him to explain himself to them. Secluded habits do not tend to eloquence; and the indifferent apathy which is so common in studious persons is exceedingly unfavorable to the liveliness of narration and illustration which is needed for excellence in even the simpler sorts of writing. Moreover, in general, it will perhaps be found that persons devoted to mere literature commonly become devoted to mere idleness. They wish to produce a great work, but they find they cannot. Having relinquished everything to devote themselves to this, they conclude on trial that this is impossible; they wish to write, but nothing occurs to them: therefore they write nothing, and they do nothing. As has been said, they have nothing to do; their life has no events, unless they are very poor; with any decent means of subsistence, they have nothing to rouse them from an indolent and musing dream. A merchant must meet his bills, or he is civilly dead and uncivilly remembered; but a student may know nothing of time and be too lazy to wind up his watch. In the retired citizen's journal in Addison's *Spectator* we have the type of this way of spending

spending the time: "Mem.— Morning eight to nine, went into the parlor and tied on my shoe-buckles."* This is the sort of life for which studious men commonly relinquish the pursuits of business and the society of their fellows.

Yet all literary men are not tedious, neither are they all slow. One great example even these most tedious times have luckily given us, to show us what may be done by a really great man even now; the same who before served as an illustration,— Sir Walter Scott. In his lifetime people denied he was a poet, but nobody said that he was not "the best fellow"† in Scotland,—perhaps that was not much,—or that he had not more wise joviality, more living talk, more graphic humor, than any man in Great Britain. "Wherever we named him," said Mr. Wordsworth, "we found the word acted as an *open sesamum;* and I believe that in the character of the *sheriff's* friends, we might have counted on a hearty welcome under any roof in the border country."‡ Never neglect to talk to people with whom you are casually thrown, was his precept; and he exemplified the maxim himself:—

"I believe," observes his biographer, "Scott has somewhere expressed in print his satisfaction that among all the changes of our manners, the ancient freedom of

No. 317. A very "wild" quotation.— Ed.

†"*He was a* thorough good fellow."— *Moore; Lockhart, Vol. V, Chap. iii.*

‡ *Lockhart, Vol. II, Chap. i.*

personal intercourse may still be indulged between a master and an out-of-doors *servant; but in truth he kept by the old fashion, even with domestic servants, to an extent which I have hardly seen practiced by any other gentleman. He conversed with his coachman if he sat by him, as he often did, on the box; with his footman, if he chanced to be in the rumble. . . Indeed, he did not confine this humanity to his own people; any steady servant of a friend of his was soon considered as a sort of friend too, and was sure to have a kind little colloquy to himself at coming and going.*" *

"Sir Walter speaks to every man as if they were blood relations," † was the expressive comment of one of these dependents. It was in this way that he acquired the great knowledge of various kinds of men which is so clear and conspicuous in his writings; nor could that knowledge have been acquired on easier terms, or in any other way. No man could describe the character of Dandie Dinmont ‡ without having been in Liddlesdale. Whatever has been once in a book may be put into a book again; but an original character, taken at first hand from the sheepwalks and from nature, must be seen in order to be known. A man, to be able to describe—indeed, to be able to know—various people in life, must be able at sight to comprehend their essential features, to know how they

* *Lockhart, Vol. IV, Chap. xi.*
† *Ibid., Vol. V, Chap. xii.*
‡ *In "Guy Mannering."*

shade

shade one into another, to see how they diversify the common uniformity of civilized life. Nor does this involve simply intellectual or even imaginative prerequisites; still less will it be facilitated by exquisite senses or subtle fancy. What is wanted is, to be able to appreciate mere clay,—which mere mind never will.

If you will describe the people,— nay, if you will write for the people,—you must be one of the people; you must have led their life, and must wish to lead their life. However strong in any poet may be the higher qualities of abstract thought or conceiving fancy, unless he can actually sympathize with those around him he can never describe those around him. Any attempt to produce a likeness of what is not really *liked* by the person who is describing it will end in the creation of what may be correct, but is not living; of what may be artistic, but is likewise artificial.

Perhaps this is the defect of the works of the greatest dramatic genius of recent times, — Goethe. His works are too much in the nature of literary studies; the mind is often deeply impressed by them, but one doubts if the author was. He saw them as he saw the houses of Weimar and the plants in the act of metamorphosis: he had a clear perception of their fixed condition and their successive transitions, but he did not really (if we may so speak) comprehend their motive power; so to say, he appreciated their life, but not their liveliness. Niebuhr, as is well known, compared the most elaborate of Goethe's works, the

novel of "Wilhelm Meister," to a menagerie of tame animals; meaning thereby, as we believe, to express much the same distinction,—he felt that there was a deficiency in mere vigor and rude energy. We have a long train and no engine; a great accumulation of excellent matter, arranged and ordered with masterly skill, but not animated with over-buoyant and unbounded play. And we trace this not to a defect in imaginative power,—a defect which it would be a simple absurdity to impute to Goethe,—but to the tone of his character and the habits of his mind. He moved hither and thither through life, but he was always a man apart. He mixed with unnumbered kinds of men, with courts and academies, students and women, camps and artists; but everywhere he was with them yet not of them. In every scene he was there; and he made it clear that he was there with a reserve and as a stranger,—he went there *to experience.*

As a man of universal culture, and well skilled in the order and classification of human life, the fact of any one class or order being beyond his reach or comprehension seemed an absurdity, and it was an absurdity; he thought he was equal to moving in any description of society, and he was equal to it; but then, on that exact account he was absorbed in none; there were none of surpassing and immeasurably preponderating captivation. No scene and no subject were to him what Scotland and Scotch nature were to Sir Walter Scott. "If I did not see the heather at least once a year, I think I should die," said the latter;

latter;* but Goethe would have lived without it, and it would not have cost him much trouble. In every one of Scott's novels there is always the spirit of the old moss-trooper, the flavor of the ancient Border; there is the intense sympathy which enters into the most living moments of the most living characters,—the lively energy which *becomes* the energy of the most vigorous persons delineated. "Marmion" was "written" while he was galloping on horseback: it reads as if it were so.

Now, it appears that Shakespeare not only had that various commerce with and experience of men which was common both to Goethe and to Scott, but also that he agrees with the latter rather than with the former in the kind and species of that experience. He was not merely with men, but of men; he was not a "thing apart,"† with a clear intuition of what was in those around him,—he had in his own nature the germs and tendencies of the very elements that he described. He knew what was in man, for he felt it in himself. Throughout all his writings you see an amazing sympathy with common people; rather an excessive tendency to dwell on the common features of ordinary lives. You feel that common people could have been cut out of him, but not without his feeling it; for it would have deprived him of a very favorite

** To Washington Irving; see Lockhart, Vol. IV, Chap. iii.*

† "Man's love is of man's life a thing apart." —"Don Juan," I, cxciv.

subject,—of a portion of his ideas to which he habitually recurred.

LEONATO. *What would you with me, honest neighbor?*
DOGBERRY. *Marry, sir, I would have some confidence with you, that decerns you nearly.*
LEON. *Brief, I pray you; for you see 'tis a busy time with me.*
DOG. *Marry, this it is, sir—*
VERGES. *Yes, in truth it is, sir.*
LEON. *What is it, my good friends?*
DOG. *Goodman Verges, sir, speaks a little off the matter: an old man, sir, and his wits are not so blunt as, God help, I would desire they were; but in faith, honest as the skin between his brows.*
VERG. *Yes, I thank God, I am as honest as any man living, that is an old man, and no honester than I.*
DOG. *Comparisons are odious;* — palabras, *neighbor Verges.*
LEON. *Neighbors, you are tedious.*
DOG. *It pleases your worship to say so, but we are the poor duke's officers; but truly, for my own part, if I were as tedious as a king, I could find in my heart to bestow it all of your worship.*

. . . . . .

LEON. *I would fain know what you have to say.*
VERG. *Marry, sir, our watch to-night, excepting your worship's presence, have ta'en a couple of as arrant knaves as any in Messina.*
DOG. *A good old man, sir; he will be talking; as they say, When the age is in, the wit is out. God help us!*

it

it is a world to see! — Well said, i' faith, neighbor Verges; — well, God's a good man; an two men ride of a horse, one must ride behind. — An honest soul, i' faith, sir, by my troth he is, as ever broke bread; but God is to be worshipped; all men are not alike, — alas, good neighbor!

LEON. *Indeed, neighbor, he comes too short of you.*

DOG. *'Gifts that God gives —' etc., etc.**

STAFFORD. *Ay, sir.*

CADE. *By her he had two children at one birth.*

STAFF. *That's false.*

CADE. *Ay, there's the question; but I say 'tis true.*
The elder of them being put to nurse,
Was by a beggar-woman stolen away;
And, ignorant of his birth and parentage,
Became a bricklayer when he came to age;
His son am I: deny it if you can.

DICK. *Nay, 'tis too true; therefore he shall be king.*

SMITH. *Sir, he made a chimney in my father's house, and the bricks are alive at this day to testify it; therefore, deny it not.*†

Shakespeare was too wise not to know that for most of the purposes of human life, stupidity is a most valuable element. He had nothing of the impatience which sharp, logical, narrow minds habitually feel when they come across those who do not apprehend their quick and precise deductions. No doubt he

* "*Much Ado About Nothing*," *III*, 5.
† "*2 King Henry VI*," *IV*, 2.

talked to the stupid players; to the stupid door-keeper; to the property man, who considers paste jewels "very preferable, besides the expense"; talked with the stupid apprentices of stupid Fleet Street, and had much pleasure in ascertaining what was their notion of "King Lear." In his comprehensive mind it was enough if every man hitched well into his own place in human life. If every one were logical and literary, how would there be scavengers or watchmen or calkers or coopers? Narrow minds will be "subdued to what they work in."* The "dyer's hand"† will not more clearly carry off its tint, nor will what is molded more precisely indicate the confines of the mold. A patient sympathy, a kindly fellow-feeling for the narrow intelligence necessarily induced by narrow circumstances,—a narrowness which in some degrees seems to be inevitable, and is perhaps more serviceable than most things to the wise conduct of life,—this, though quick and half-bred minds may despise it, seems to be a necessary constituent in the composition of manifold genius. "How shall the world be served?" asks the host in Chaucer. We must have cart-horses as well as race-horses, draymen as well as poets. It is no bad thing, after all, to be a slow man and to have one idea a year. You don't make a figure, perhaps, in argumentative society, which requires a quicker species of thought; but is that the worse?

**Shakespeare, Sonnet CXI, Vol. 1–18.*
†Ibid.

HOLOFERNES. *Via, Goodman Dull! thou hast spoken no word all this while.*
DULL. *Nor understood none neither, sir.*
HOL. *Allons! we will employ thee.*
DULL. *I'll make one in a dance or so; or I will play On the tabor to the worthies, and let them dance the hay.*
HOL. *Most dull, honest Dull! to our sport away!**

And such, we believe, was the notion of Shakespeare. S. T. Coleridge has a nice criticism which bears on this point. He observes that in the narrations of uneducated people in Shakespeare, just as in real life, there is a want of prospectiveness and a superfluous amount of regressiveness. People of this sort are unable to look a long way in front of them, and they wander from the right path. They get on too fast with one half, and then the other hopelessly lags. They can tell a story exactly as it is told to them (as an animal can go step by step where it has been before); but they can't calculate its bearings beforehand or see how it is to be adapted to those to whom they are speaking, nor do they know how much they have thoroughly told and how much they have not. "I went up the street, then I went down the street; no, first went down and then — but you do not follow me; I go before you, sir." Thence arises the complex style usually adopted by persons not used to narration. They tumble into a story and get on as

*"*Love's Labor's Lost*," *V, I.*

they can. This is scarcely the sort of thing which a man could foresee. Of course a metaphysician can account for it, and, like Coleridge, assure you that if he had not observed it, he could have predicted it in a moment; but, nevertheless, it is too refined a conclusion to be made out from known premises by common reasoning. Doubtless there is some reason why negroes have woolly hair (and if you look into a philosophical treatise, you will find that the author could have made out that it would be so, if he had not, by a mysterious misfortune, known from infancy that it was the fact); still, one could never have supposed it one's self. And in the same manner, though the profounder critics may explain in a satisfactory and refined manner how the confused and undulating style of narration is peculiarly incident to the mere multitude, yet it is most likely that Shakespeare derived his acquaintance with it from the fact, from actual hearing, and not from what may be the surer but is the slower process of metaphysical deduction. The best passage to illustrate this is that in which the nurse gives a statement of Juliet's age; but it will not exactly suit our pages. The following of Mrs. Quickly will suffice:

"*Tilly-fally, Sir John, ne'er tell me; your ancient swaggerer comes not in my doors. I was before Master Tisick, the deputy, t'other day; and as he said to me, — 'twas no longer ago than Wednesday last: 'Neighbor Quickly,' says he, — Master Dumb, our minister, was by then, — 'Neighbor Quickly,' says he, 'receive those that are civil; for,' saith he, 'you are in an ill* name:

name:'— now,' a said so, I can tell whereupon: 'for,' says he, 'you are an honest woman, and well thought on; therefore take heed what guests you receive. Receive,' says he, 'no swaggering companions.'— There comes none here.— You would bless you to hear what he said: — no, I'll no swaggerers." *

Now, it is quite impossible that this, any more than the political reasoning on the parentage of Cade, which was cited before, should have been written by one not habitually and sympathizingly conversant with the talk of the illogical classes. Shakespeare felt, if we may say so, the force of the bad reasoning. He did not, like a sharp logician, angrily detect a flaw, and set it down as a fallacy of reference or a fallacy of amphibology. This is not the English way, though Dr. Whately's logic has been published so long (and, as he says himself, must now be deemed to be irrefutable, since no one has ever offered any refutation of it). Still, people in this country do not like to be committed to distinct premises. They like a Chancellor of the Exchequer to say, "It has during very many years been maintained by the honorable member for Montrose that two and two make four, and I am free to say that I think there is a great deal to be said in favor of that opinion; but, without committing Her Majesty's Government to that proposition as an abstract sentiment, I will go so far as to assume two and two are not sufficient to make five, which, with the permission of the House, will be a sufficient basis

* "*2 King Henry" IV, II. 4.*

for all the operations which I propose to enter upon during the present year." We have no doubt Shakespeare reasoned in that way himself. Like any other Englishman, when he had a clear course before him, he rather liked to shuffle over little hitches in the argument, and on that account he had a great sympathy with those who did so too. He would never have interrupted Mrs. Quickly: he saw that her mind was going to and fro over the subject; he saw that it was coming right, and this was enough for him,—and will be also enough of this topic for our readers.

We think we have proved that Shakespeare had an enormous specific acquaintance with the common people; that this can only be obtained by sympathy. It likewise has a further condition.

In spiritedness the style of Shakespeare is very like to that of Scott. The description of a charge of cavalry in Scott reads, as was said before, as if it was written on horseback. A play by Shakespeare reads as if it were written in a play-house. The great critics assure you that a theatrical audience must be kept awake; but Shakespeare knew this of his own knowledge. When you read him, you feel a sensation of motion; a conviction that there is something "up"; a notion that not only is something being talked about, but also that something is being done. We do not imagine that Shakespeare owed this quality to his being a player, but rather that he became a player because he possessed this quality of mind. For after and notwithstanding everything which has [been] or may be said against the theatrical profession,

profession, it certainly does require from those who pursue it a certain quickness and liveliness of mind. Mimics are commonly an elastic sort of persons, and it takes a little levity of disposition to enact even the "heavy fathers." If a boy joins a company of strolling players, you may be sure that he is not a "good boy": he may be a trifle foolish, or a thought romantic, but certainly he is not slow. And this was in truth the case with Shakespeare. They say, too, that in the beginning he was a first-rate link-boy; and the tradition is affecting, though we fear it is not quite certain. Anyhow, you feel about Shakespeare that he could have been a link-boy. In the same way you feel he may have been a player. You are sure at once that he could not have followed any sedentary kind of life. But wheresoever there was anything *acted*, in earnest or in jest, by way of mock representation or by way of serious reality, there he found matter for his mind.

If anybody could have any doubt about the liveliness of Shakespeare, let them consider the character of Falstaff. When a man has created *that* without a capacity for laughter, then a blind man may succeed in describing colors. Intense animal spirits are the single sentiment (if they be a sentiment) of the entire character. If most men were to save up all the gayety of their whole lives, it would come about to the gayety of one speech in Falstaff. A morose man might have amassed many jokes; might have observed many details of jovial society; might have conceived a Sir John marked by rotundity of body,

but could hardly have imagined what we call his rotundity of mind. We mean that the animal spirits of Falstaff give him an easy, vague, diffusive sagacity which is peculiar to him. A morose man — Iago, for example — may know anything, and is apt to know a good deal; but what he knows is generally all in corners. He knows No. 1, No. 2, No. 3, and so on; but there is not anything continuous or smooth or fluent in his knowledge. Persons conversant with the works of Hazlitt will know in a minute what we mean. Everything which he observed he seemed to observe from a certain soreness of mind: he looked at people because they offended him; he had the same vivid notion of them that a man has of objects which grate on a wound in his body. But there is nothing at all of this in Falstaff; on the contrary, everything pleases him, and everything is food for a joke. Cheerfulness and prosperity give an easy abounding sagacity of mind which nothing else does give. Prosperous people bound easily over all the surface of things which their lives present to them. Very likely they keep to the surface; there are things beneath or above to which they may not penetrate or attain: but what is on any part of the surface, that they know well. "Lift not the painted veil which those who live call life,"* and they do not lift it. What is sublime or awful above, what is "sightless and drear"† beneath,—these they may

* *Shelley, Sonnet (1818).*
† *Ibid.*

not

not dream of. Nor is any one piece or corner of life so well impressed on them as on minds less happily constituted. It is only people who have had a tooth out that really know the dentist's waiting-room. Yet such people, for the time at least, know nothing but that and their tooth. The easy and sympathizing friend who accompanies them knows everything; hints gently at the contents of the *Times*, and would cheer you with Lord Palmerston's replies. So, on a greater scale, the man of painful experience knows but too well what has hurt him, and where and why; but the happy have a vague and rounded view of the round world, and such was the knowledge of Falstaff.

It is to be observed that these high spirits are not a mere excrescence or superficial point in an experiencing nature; on the contrary, they seem to be essential, if not to its idea of existence, at least to its exercise and employment. How are you to know people without talking to them? but how are you to talk to them without tiring yourself? A common man is exhausted in half an hour; Scott or Shakespeare could have gone on for a whole day. This is perhaps peculiarly necessary for a painter of English life.

The basis of our national character seems to be a certain energetic humor, which may be found in full vigor in old Chaucer's time, and in great perfection in at least one of the popular writers of this age, and which is perhaps most easily described by the name of our greatest painter, — Hogarth. It is

amusing to see how entirely the efforts of critics and artists fail to naturalize in England any other sort of painting. Their efforts are fruitless, for the people painted are not English people: they may be Italians or Greeks or Jews, but it is quite certain that they are foreigners. We should not fancy that modern art ought to resemble the mediæval. So long as artists attempt the same class of paintings as Raphael they will not only be inferior to Raphael, but they will never please, as they might please, the English people. What we want is what Hogarth gave us,—a representation of ourselves. It may be that we are wrong; that we ought to prefer something of the old world, some scene in Rome or Athens, some tale from Carmel or Jerusalem. But, after all, we do not. These places are, we think, abroad, and had their greatness in former times: we wish a copy of what now exists, and of what we have seen. London we know, and Manchester we know; but where are all these? It is the same with literature,—Milton excepted, and even Milton can hardly be called a popular writer: all great English writers describe English people, and in describing them they give, as they must give, a large comic element; and speaking generally, this is scarcely possible except in the case of cheerful and easy-living men. There is, no doubt, a biting satire, like that of Swift, which has for its essence misanthropy; there is the mockery of Voltaire, which is based on intellectual contempt: but this is not our English humor,—it is not that of Shakespeare and Falstaff; ours is the humor

humor of a man who laughs when he speaks, of flowing enjoyment, of an experiencing nature.

Yet it would be a great error if we gave anything like an exclusive prominence to this aspect of Shakespeare. Thus he appeared to those around him,—in some degree they knew that he was a cheerful and humorous and happy man; but of his higher gift they knew less than we. A great painter of men must (as has been said) have a faculty of conversing, but he must also have a capacity for solitude. There is much of mankind that a man can only learn from himself. Behind every man's external life, which he leads in company, there is another which he leads alone, and which he carries with him apart. We see but one aspect of our neighbor, as we see but one side of the moon; in either case there is also a dark half, which is unknown to us. We all come down to dinner, but each has a room to himself. And if we would study the internal lives of others, it seems essential that we should begin with our own. If we study this our *datum*, if we attain to see and feel how this influences and evolves itself in our social and (so to say) public life, then it is possible that we may find in the lives of others the same or analogous features; and if we do not, then at least we may suspect that those who want them are deficient likewise in the secret agencies which we feel produce them in ourselves. The metaphysicians assert that people originally picked up the idea of the existence of other people in this way. It is orthodox doctrine that a baby says, "I have a mouth,

mamma has a mouth: therefore I am the same species as mamma. I have a nose, papa has a nose; therefore papa is the same genus as me." But whether or not this ingenious idea really does or does not represent the actual process by which we originally obtain an acquaintance with the existence of minds analogous to our own, it gives unquestionably the process by which we obtain our notion of that part of those minds which they never exhibit consciously to others, and which only becomes predominant in secrecy and solitude and to themselves. Now, that Shakespeare has this insight into the musing life of man, as well as into his social life, is easy to prove; take, for instance, the following passages:—

"*This battles fares like to the morning's war,*
When dying clouds contend with growing light;
What time the shepherd, blowing of his nails,
Can neither call it perfect day nor night.
Now sways it this way, like a mighty sea
Forced by the tide to combat with the wind;
Now sways it that way, like the selfsame sea
Forced to retire by fury of the wind:
Sometimes the flood prevails, and then the wind;
Now one the better, then another best;
Both tugging to be victors, breast to breast,
Yet neither conqueror nor conquered:
So is the equal poise of this fell war.
Here on this molehill will I sit me down.
To whom God will, there be the victory!

For

For Margaret my queen, and Clifford too,
Have chid me from the battle; swearing both
They prosper best of all when I am thence.
Would I were dead! if God's good will were so;
For what is in this world but grief and woe?
O God! methinks it were a happy life,
To be no better than a homely swain:
To sit upon a hill, as I do now,
To carve out dials quaintly, point by point,
Thereby to see the minutes how they run,—
How many make the hour full complete;
How many hours bring about the day;
How many days will finish up the year;
How many years a mortal man may live.
When this is known, then to divide the times,—
So many hours must I tend my flock;
So many hours must I take my rest;
So many hours must I contemplate;
So many hours must I sport myself;
So many days my ewes have been with young;
So many weeks ere the poor fools will yean;
So many years ere I shall shear the fleece:
So minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, and years,
Passed over to the end they were created,
Would bring white hairs unto a quiet grave.
Ah, what a life were this! how sweet! how lovely!
Gives not the hawthorn bush a sweeter shade
To shepherds, looking on their silly sheep,
Than doth a rich embroidered canopy
To kings that fear their subjects' treachery?
Oh, yes, it doth; a thousandfold it doth.

And to conclude, — the shepherd's homely curds,
His cold thin drink out of his leather bottle,
His wonted sleep under a fresh tree's shade,
All which secure and sweetly he enjoys,
Is far beyond a prince's delicates,
His viands sparkling in a golden cup,
His body couchèd in a curious bed,
When care, mistrust, and treason wait on him." *

"A fool, a fool! — I met a fool i' the forest,
A motley fool; — a miserable world! —
As I do live by food, I met a fool;
Who laid him down and basked him in the sun,
And railed on lady Fortune in good terms,
In good set terms, — and yet a motley fool.
'Good-morrow, fool,' quoth I; 'No, sir,' quoth he,
'Call me not fool, till Heaven hath sent me fortune':
And then he drew a dial from his poke,
And looking on it with lack-luster eye,
Says, very wisely, 'It is ten o'clock;
Thus may we see,' quoth he, 'how the world wags:
'Tis but an hour ago since it was nine;
And after one hour more 'twill be eleven;
And so, from hour to hour, we ripe and ripe,
And then, from hour to hour, we rot and rot, —
And thereby hangs a tale.' When I did hear
The motley fool thus moral on the time,
My lungs began to crow like chanticleer,
That fools should be so deep-contemplative;

* "*3 King Henry VI*," *II*, 5.

And

And I did laugh sans intermission,
An hour by his dial." *

No slight versatility of mind and pliancy of fancy could pass at will from scenes such as these to the ward of Eastcheap, and the society which heard the chimes at midnight. One of the reasons of the rarity of great imaginative works is, that in very few cases is this capacity for musing solitude combined with that of observing mankind. A certain constitutional though latent melancholy is essential to such a nature. This is the exceptional characteristic in Shakespeare. All through his works you feel you are reading the popular author, the successful man; but through them all there is a certain tinge of musing sadness pervading, and as it were softening, their gayety. Not a trace can be found of "eating cares" or narrow and mind-contracting toil; but everywhere there is, in addition to shrewd sagacity and buoyant wisdom, a refining element of chastening sensibility, which prevents sagacity from being rough and shrewdness from becoming cold. He had an eye for either sort of life:—

"*Why, let the strucken deer go weep,*
The hart ungallèd play;
For some must watch, while some must sleep:
So runs the world away."†

* "*As You Like It*," *II*, 7.
† "*Hamlet*," *III*, 2.

In another point also, Shakespeare, as he was must be carefully contrasted with the estimate that would be formed of him from such delineations as that of Falstaff, and that was, doubtless, frequently made by casual, though only by casual, frequenters of "The Mermaid." It has been said that the mind of Shakespeare contained within it the mind of Scott; it remains to be observed that it contained also the mind of Keats. For, beside the delineation of human life, and beside also the delineation of nature, there remains also for the poet a third subject,—the delineation of *fancies*. Of course these, be they what they may, are like to and were originally borrowed either from men or from nature,—from one or from both together. We know but two things in the simple way of direct experience, and whatever else we know must be in some mode or manner compacted out of them. Yet "books are a substantial world, both pure and good," and so are fancies too. In all countries men have devised to themselves a whole series of half-divine creations,—mythologies, Greek and Roman, fairies, angels; beings who may be, for aught we know, but with whom in the meantime we can attain to no conversation. The most known of these mythologies are the Greek and—what is, we suppose, the second epoch of the Gothic—the fairies; and it so happens that Shakespeare has dealt with them both, and in a remarkable manner. We are not, indeed, of those critics who profess simple and unqualified admiration for the poem of "Venus and Adonis." It seems intrinsically, as we know it from external

external testimony to have been, a juvenile production, written when Shakespeare's nature might be well expected to be crude and unripened. Power is shown, and power of a remarkable kind; but it is not displayed in a manner that will please, or does please, the mass of men. In spite of the name of its author, the poem has never been popular; and surely this is sufficient. Nevertheless, it is remarkable as a literary exercise, and as a treatment of a singular though unpleasant subject. The fanciful class of poems differ from others in being laid, so far as their scene goes, in a perfectly unseen world. The type of such productions is Keats's "Endymion." We mean that it is the type, not as giving the abstract perfection of this sort of art, but because it shows and embodies both its excellences and defects in a very marked and prominent manner. In that poem there are no passions and no actions, there is no art and no life; but there is beauty, and that is meant to be enough, and to a reader of one-and-twenty it is enough and more. What are exploits or speeches, what is Cæsar or Coriolanus, what is a tragedy like "Lear," or a real view of human life in any kind whatever, to people who do not know and do not care what human life is? In early youth it is perhaps not true that the passions, taken generally, are particularly violent, or that the imagination is in any remarkable degree powerful; but it is certain that the fancy (which, though it be in the last resort but a weak stroke of that same faculty which when it strikes hard we call imagination, may yet for this purpose be looked on as dis-

tinct) is particularly wakeful, and that the gentler species of passions are more absurd than they are afterwards. And the literature of this period of human life runs naturally away from the real world; away from the less ideal portion of it,—from stocks and stones, and aunts and uncles,—and rests on mere half-embodied sentiments, which in the hands of great poets assume a kind of semi-personality, and are, to the distinction between things and persons, "as moonlight unto sunlight, and as water unto wine."* The "Sonnets" of Shakespeare belong exactly to the same school of poetry. They are not the sort of verses to take any particular hold upon the mind permanently and forever, but at a certain period they take too much. For a young man to read in the spring of the year, among green fields and in gentle air, they are the ideal. As first-of-April poetry they are perfect. The "Midsummer Night's Dream" is of another order. If the question were to be decided by "Venus and Adonis," in spite of the unmeasured panegyrics of many writers, we should be obliged in equity to hold that, as a poet of mere fancy Shakespeare was much inferior to the late Mr. Keats, and even to meaner men. Moreover, we should have been prepared with some refined reasonings to show that it was unlikely that a poet with so much hold on reality, in life and nature, both in solitude and in society, should have also a similar command over *un*reality: should possess a command not only of flesh and blood, but of

*Tennyson, "*Locksley Hall.*"

the

the imaginary entities which the self-inworking fancy brings forth, — impalpable conceptions of mere mind; *quoedam simulacra modis pallentia miris;* * thin ideas, which come we know not whence, and are given us we know not why. But unfortunately for this ingenious if not profound suggestion, Shakespeare in fact possessed the very faculty which it tends to prove that he would not possess. He could paint Poins and Falstaff, but he excelled also in fairy legends. He had such

> "*Seething brains,*
> *Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend*
> *More than cool reason ever comprehends.*"†

As, for example, the idea of Puck or Queen Mab, of Ariel, or such a passage as the following: —

PUCK. *How now, spirit! whither wander you?*
FAIRY. *Over hill, over dale,*
thorough bush, thorough briar,
Over park, over pale,
Thorough flood, thorough fire,
I do wander everywhere,
Swifter than the moon's sphere;
And I serve the fairy queen,
To dew her orbs upon the green:
The cowslips tall her pensioners be;
In their gold coats spots you see, —

* "*Certain wonderfully pale phantoms.*" — *Lucretius, I, 24.*
† "*Midsummer Night's Dream,*" *V. i.*

Those be rubies, fairy favors,
In those freckles live their savors:
I must go seek some dewdrops here,
And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear.
Farewell, thou lob of spirits; I'll be gone:
Our queen and all our elves come here anon.
PUCK. *The king doth keep his revels here to-night:*
Take heed the queen come not within his sight.
For Oberon is passing fell and wrath,
Because that she, as her attendant, hath
A lovely boy, stolen from an Indian king,—
She never had so sweet a changeling;
And jealous Oberon would have the child
Knight of his train, to trace the forests wild:
But she perforce withholds the lovèd boy,
Crowns him with flowers, and makes him all her joy;
And now they never meet in grove or green,
By fountain clear or spangled starlight sheen,
But they do square, that all their elves, for fear,
Creep into acorn cups, and hide them there.
FAIRY. *Either I mistake your shape and making quite,*
Or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite
Called Robin Goodfellow: are you not he
That frights the maidens of the villagery;
Skims milk; and sometimes labors in the quern,
And bootless makes the breathless housewife churn;
And sometime makes the drink to bear no harm;
Misleads night-wanderers, laughing at their harm?
Those that Hobgoblin call you, and sweet Puck,
You do their work, and they shall have good luck:
Are not you he?

PUCK.

PUCK. *Fairy, thou speak'st aright;*
I am that merry wanderer of the night.
I jest to Oberon, and make him smile,
When I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile,
Neighing in likeness of a filly foal:
And sometime lurk I in a gossip's bowl,
In very likeness of a roasted crab;
And when she drinks, against her lips I bob.
And on her withered dewlap pour the ale.
The wisest aunt, telling the saddest tale,
Sometime for three-foot stool mistaketh me;
Then slip I from her bum, down topples she,
And "tailor" cries, and falls into a cough;
And then the whole quire hold their hips and loffe,
And waxen in their mirth, and neeze, and swear
A merrier hour was never wasted there. —
But room now, Fairy! here comes Oberon.
FAIRY. *And here my mistress. — Would that he were gone!* *

Probably he believed in these things. Why not? everybody else believed in them then. They suit our climate. As the Greek mythology suits the keen Attic sky, the fairies indistinct and half-defined, suit a land of mild mists and gentle airs. They confuse the "maidens of the villagery"; they are the paganism of the South of England.

Can it be made out what were Shakespeare's political views? We think it certainly can, and that without

* "*Midsummer Night's Dream*," *II, I.*

difficulty. From the English historical plays, it distinctly appears that he accepted, like everybody then, the Constitution of his country. His lot was not cast in an age of political controversy, nor of reform. What was, was from of old. The Wars of the Roses had made it very evident how much room there was for the evils incident to an hereditary monarchy (for instance, those of a controverted succession) and the evils incident to an aristocracy (as want of public spirit and audacious selfishness) to arise and continue within the realm of England. Yet they had not repelled, and had barely disconcerted, our conservative ancestors. They had not become Jacobins; they did not concur—and history, except in Shakespeare, hardly does justice to them—in Jack Cade's notion that the laws should come out of his mouth, or that the commonwealth was to be reformed by interlocutors in this scene:—

GEORGE. *I tell thee Jack Cade the clothier means to dress the commonwealth, and turn it, and set a new nap upon it.*

JOHN. *So he had need, for 'tis threadbare. Well, I say it was never a merry world in England since gentlemen came up.*

GEORGE. *O miserable age! virtue is not regarded in handicraftsmen.*

JOHN. *The nobility think scorn to go in leather aprons.*

GEORGE. *Nay, more, the king's council are no good workmen.*

JOHN. *True; and yet it is said, Labor in thy vocation; which*

which is as much as to say as, Let the magistrates be laboring men : and therefore should we be magistrates.
GEORGE. *Thou hast hit it ; for there's no better sign of a brave mind than a hard hand.*
JOHN. *I see them ! I see them !* *

The English people did see them and know them, and therefore have rejected them. An audience which, *bonâ fide*, entered into the merit of this scene, would never believe in everybody's suffrage. They would know that there is such a thing as nonsense; and when a man has once attained to that deep conception, you may be sure of him ever after. And though it would be absurd to say that Shakespeare originated this idea, or that disbelief in simple democracy is owing to his teachings or suggestions, yet it may, nevertheless, be truly said that he shared in the peculiar knowledge of men, and also possessed the peculiar constitution of mind, which engenders this effect. The author of "Coriolanus" never believed in a mob, and did something towards preventing anybody else from doing so. But this political idea was not exactly the strongest in Shakespeare's mind. We think he had two other stronger, or as strong.

First, the feeling of loyalty to the ancient polity of this country,— not because it was good, but because it existed. In his time, people no more thought of the origin of the monarchy than they did of the origin of the Mendip Hills. The one had always been there, and so had the other. God (such was the

* "*2 King Henry VI*," *IV*, *2*.

common notion) had made both, and one as much as the other. Everywhere, in that age, the common modes of political speech assumed the existence of certain utterly national institutions, and would have been worthless and nonsensical except on that assumption. This national habit appears, as it ought to appear, in our national dramatist. A great divine tells us that the Thirty-nine Articles are "forms of thought,"—inevitable conditions of the religious understanding: in politics, "King, Lords, and Commons" are, no doubt, "forms of thought" to the great majority of Englishmen,—in these they live, and beyond these they never move. They can't reason on the removal (such is the notion) of the English Channel, nor St. George's Channel, nor can you of the English Constitution in like manner. It is to most of us, and to the happiest of us, a thing immutable; and such, no doubt, it was to Shakespeare, which, if any one would have proved, let him refer at random to any page of the historical English plays.

The second peculiar tenet which we ascribe to his political creed is a disbelief in the middle classes. We fear he had no opinion of traders. In this age, we know, it is held that the keeping of a shop is equivalent to a political education. Occasionally, in country villages, where the trader sells everything, he is thought to know nothing, and has no vote; but in a town where he is a householder (as indeed he is in the country), and sells only one thing, there we assume that he knows everything. And this assumption

sumption is, in the opinion of some observers, confirmed by the fact. Sir Walter Scott used to relate that when, after a trip to London, he returned to Tweedside, he always found the people in that district knew more of politics than the Cabinet.* And so it is with the mercantile community in modern times. If you are a Chancellor of the Exchequer, it is possible that you may be acquainted with finance; but, if you sell figs, it is certain that you will. Now, we nowhere find this laid down in Shakespeare. On the contrary, you will generally find that when a "citizen" is mentioned, he generally does or says something absurd. Shakespeare had a clear perception that it is possible to bribe a class as well as an individual, and that personal obscurity is but an insecure guarantee for political disinterestedness.

"*Moreover, he hath left you all his walks,*
His private arbors and new planted-orchards,
On this side Tiber; he hath left them you,
And to your heirs forever: common pleasures,
To walk abroad and recreate yourselves.
Here was a Cæsar! when comes such another?" †

He everywhere speaks in praise of a tempered and ordered and qualified polity, in which the pecuniary classes have a certain influence, but no more; and

* *Letter to Sidmouth, April 20, 1821; in Lockhart, Vol. V, Chap. iii.*
† "*Julius Cæsar*," *III, 2.*

shows in every page a keen sensibility to the large views and high-souled energies, the gentle refinements and disinterested desires, in which those classes are likely to be especially deficient. He is particularly the poet of personal nobility, though throughout his writings there is a sense of freedom; just as Milton is the poet of freedom, though with an underlying reference to personal nobility: indeed, we might well expect our two poets to combine the appreciation of a rude and generous liberty with that of a delicate and refined nobleness, since it is the union of these two elements that characterizes our society and their experience.

There are two things—good-tempered sense and ill-tempered sense. In our remarks on the character of Falstaff, we hope we have made it very clear that Shakespeare had the former; we think it nearly as certain that he possessed the latter also. An instance of this might be taken from that contempt for the perspicacity of the *bourgeoisie* which we have just been mentioning. It is within the limits of what may be called malevolent sense to take extreme and habitual pleasure in remarking the foolish opinions, the narrow notions, and [the] fallacious deductions which seem to cling to the pompous and prosperous man of business. Ask him his opinion of the currency question and he puts "bills" and "bullion" together in a sentence, and he does not seem to care what he puts between them. But a more proper instance of (what has an odd sound) the malevolence of Shakespeare is to be found in the play of "Measure for

for Measure." We agree with Hazlitt this play seems to be written, perhaps more than any other, *con amore*, and with a relish; and this seems to be the reason why, notwithstanding the unpleasant nature of its plot and the absence of any very attractive character, it is yet one of the plays which take hold on the mind most easily and most powerfully. Now, the entire character of Angelo, which is the expressive feature of the piece, is nothing but a successful embodiment of the pleasure, the malevolent pleasure, which a warm-blooded and expansive man takes in watching the rare, the dangerous and inanimate excesses of the constrained and cold-blooded. One seems to see Shakespeare, with his bright eyes and his large lips and buoyant face, watching with a pleasant excitement the excesses of his thin-lipped and calculating creation, as though they were the excesses of a real person. It is the complete picture of a natural hypocrite, who does not consciously disguise strong impulses, but whose very passions seem of their own accord to have disguised themselves and retreated into the recesses of the character, yet only to recur even more dangerously when their proper period is expired, when the will is cheated into security by their absence, and the world (and it may be the "judicious person" himself) is impressed with a sure reliance in his chilling and remarkable rectitude.

It has, we believe, been doubted whether Shakespeare was a man much conversant with the intimate society of women. Of course no one denies that he

possessed a great knowledge of them,—a capital acquaintance with their excellences, faults and foibles; but it has been thought that this was the result rather of imagination than of society, of creative fancy rather than of perceptive experience. Now, that Shakespeare possessed, among other singular qualities, a remarkable imaginative knowledge of women, is quite certain, for he was acquainted with the soliloquies of women. A woman, we suppose, like a man, must be alone in order to speak a soliloquy. After the greatest possible intimacy and experience, it must still be imagination, or fancy at least, which tells any man what a woman thinks of herself and to herself. There will still—get as near the limits of confidence or observation as you can—be a space which must be filled up from other means. Men can only divine the truth; reserve, indeed, is a part of its charm. Seeing, therefore, that Shakespeare had done what necessarily and certainly must be done without experience, we were in some doubt whether he might not have dispensed with it altogether. A grave reviewer cannot know these things. We thought indeed of reasoning that since the delineations of women in Shakespeare were admitted to be first-rate, it should follow—at least there was a fair presumption—that no means or aid had been wanting to their production; and that consequently we ought, in the absence of distinct evidence, to assume that personal intimacy as well as solitary imagination had been concerned in their production. And we meant to cite the "questions about Octavia,

via," which Lord Byron, who thought he had the means of knowing, declared to be "woman all over."*

But all doubt was removed and all conjecture set to rest by the coming in of an ably dressed friend from the external world, who mentioned that the language of Shakespeare's women was essentially female language; that there were certain points and peculiarities in the English of cultivated Englishwomen which made it a language of itself, which must be heard familiarly in order to be known. And he added, "except a greater use of words of Latin derivation, as was natural in an age when ladies received a learned education, a few words not now proper, a few conceits that were the fashion of the time, and there is the very same English in the women's speeches in Shakespeare." He quoted:—

"*Think not I love him, though I ask for him:*
'Tis but a peevish boy;—yet he talks well;—
But what care I for words? yet words do well,
When he that speaks them pleases those that hear.
It is a pretty youth:—not very pretty:—
But sure, he's proud and yet his pride becomes him:
He'll make a proper man. The best thing in him
Is his complexion; and faster than his tongue
Did make offense, his eye did heal it up.
He is not tall; yet for his years he's tall:
His leg is but so-so; and yet 'tis well.
There was a pretty redness in his lip;

*Journal, Nov. 16, 1813.

A little riper and more lusty red
Than that mixed in his cheek: it was just the difference
Betwixt the constant red and mingled damask.
There be some women, Silvius, had they marked him
In parcels as I did, would have gone near
To fall in love with him: but for my part,
I love him not, nor hate him not: and yet
I have more cause to hate him than to love him:
For what had he to do to chide at me?
He said my eyes were black, and my hair black,
And, now I am remembered, scorned at me;
I marvel why I answered not again:
But that's all one;" *

and the passage of Perdita's cited before about the daffodils that

"Take
The winds of March with beauty; violets dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
Or Cytherea's breath";

and said that these were conclusive. But we have not, ourselves, heard young ladies converse in that manner.

Perhaps it is in his power of delineating women that Shakespeare contrasts most strikingly with the greatest master of the art of dialogue in antiquity,—we mean Plato. It will no doubt be said that the delineation of women did not fall within Plato's plan;

* "*As Like It*," *III*, 5.

that

that men's life was in that age so separate and predominant that it could be delineated by itself and apart: and no doubt these remarks are very true. But what led Plato to form that plan? What led him to select that peculiar argumentative aspect of life, in which the masculine element is in so high a degree superior? We believe that he did it because he felt that he could paint that kind of scene much better than he could paint any other. If a person will consider the sort of conversation that was held in the cool summer morning, when Socrates was knocked up early to talk definitions and philosophy with Protagoras, he will feel, not only that women would fancy such dialogues to be certainly stupid, and very possibly to be without meaning, but also that the side of character which is there represented is one from which not only the feminine but even the epicene element is nearly if not perfectly excluded. It is the intellect surveying and delineating intellectual characteristics. We have a dialogue of thinking faculties: the character of every man is delineated by showing us, not his mode of action or feeling, but his mode of thinking, alone and by itself. The pure mind, purged of all passion and affection, strives to view and describe others in like manner; and the singularity is, that the likenesses so taken are so good,—that the accurate copying of the merely intellectual effects and indications of character gives so true and so firm an impression of the whole character,—that a daguerreotype of the mind should almost seem to be a delineation of the life. But though

in the hand of a consummate artist such a way of representation may in some sense succeed in the case of men, it would certainly seem sure to fail in the case of women. The mere intellect of woman is a mere nothing: it originates nothing, it transmits nothing, it retains nothing; it has little life of its own, and therefore it can hardly be expected to attain any vigor. Of the lofty Platonic world of the ideas which the soul in the old doctrine, was to arrive at by pure and continuous reasoning, women were never expected to know anything. Plato, though Mr. Grote denies that he was a practical man, was much too practical for that: he reserved his teaching for people whose belief was regulated and induced in some measure by abstract investigations; who had an interest in the pure and (as it were) geometrical truth itself; who had an intellectual character (apart from and accessory to their other character) capable of being viewed as a large and substantial existence. Shakespeare's being, like a woman's, worked as a whole. He was capable of intellectual abstractedness, but commonly he was touched with the sense of earth. One thinks of him as firmly set on our coarse world of common clay, but from it he could paint the moving essence of thoughtful feeling,—which is the best refinement of the best women. Imogen or Juliet would have thought little of the conversation of Gorgias.

On few subjects has more nonsense been written than on the learning of Shakespeare. In former times the established tenet was, that he was acquainted

quainted with the entire range of the Greek and Latin classics, and familiarly resorted to Sophocles and Æschylus as guides and models. This creed reposed not so much on any painful or elaborate criticism of Shakespeare's plays, as on one of the *a priori* assumptions permitted to the indolence of the wise old world. It was then considered clear, by all critics, that no one could write good English who could not also write bad Latin. Questioning skepticism has rejected this axiom, and refuted with contemptuous facility the slight attempt which had been made to verify this case of it from the evidence of the plays themselves. But the new school, not content with showing that Shakespeare was no formed or elaborate scholar, propounded the idea that he was quite ignorant, just as Mr. Croker "demonstrates" that Napoleon Bonaparte could scarcely write or read. The answer is, that Shakespeare wrote his plays, and that those plays show not only a very powerful, but also a very cultivated mind. A hard student Shakespeare was not, yet he was a happy and pleased reader of interesting books. He was a natural reader: when a book was dull he put it down, when it looked fascinating he took it up; and the consequence is, that he remembered and mastered what he read. Lively books, read with lively interest leave strong and living recollections. The instructors, no doubt, say that they ought not to do so, and inculcate the necessity of dry reading; yet the good sense of a busy public has practically discovered that what is read easily is recollected easily, and what is read with

difficulty is remembered with more. It is certain that Shakespeare read the novels of his time, for he has founded on them the stories of his plays; he read Plutarch, for his words still live in the dialogue of the "proud Roman" plays; and it is remarkable that Montaigne is the only philosopher that Shakespeare can be proved to have read, because he deals more than any other philosopher with the first impressions of things which exist. On the other hand, it may be doubted if Shakespeare would have perused his commentators. Certainly he would have never read a page of this review; and we go so far as to doubt whether he would have been pleased with the admirable discourses of M. Guizot, which we ourselves, though ardent admirers of his style and ideas, still find it a little difficult to *read;* and what would he have thought of the following speculations of an anonymous individual, whose notes have been recently published in a fine octavo by Mr. Collier, and according to the periodical essayists, "contribute valuable suggestions to the illustration of the immortal bard"?

THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA

Act I. Scene I.

P. 92. The reading of the subsequent line has hitherto been

"'Tis true; for you are over boots in love";

but

but the manuscript corrector of the Folio, 1632, has changed it to

"'Tis true; *but* you are over boots in love,"

which seems more consistent with the course of the dialogue: for Proteus *remarking that Leander had been "more than over shoes in love" with Hero,* Valentine *answers that* Proteus *was even more deeply in love than Leander.* Proteus *observes of the fable of Hero and Leander —*

"That's a deep story of a deeper love,
For he was more than over shoes in love."

Valentine retorts: —

"'Tis true; *but* you are over boots in love."

For *instead of* but *was perhaps caught by the compositor from the preceding line.*

It is difficult to fancy Shakespeare perusing a volume of such annotations, though we allow that we admire them ourselves. As to the controversy on his school learning, we have only to say that though the alleged imitations of the Greek tragedians are mere nonsense, yet there is clear evidence that Shakespeare received the ordinary grammar-school education of his time, and that he had derived from the pain and suffering of several years not exactly an acquaintance with Greek or Latin, but, like Eton boys, a firm conviction that there are such languages.

Another controversy has been raised as to whether Shakespeare was religious. In the old editions it is commonly enough laid down that when writing his plays he had no desire to fill the Globe Theater, but that his intentions were of the following description: "In this play [Cymbeline] Shakespeare has strongly depicted the frailties of our nature, and the effect of vicious passions on the human mind. In the fate of the Queen we behold the adept in perfidy justly sacrificed by the arts she had, with unnatural ambition, prepared for others; and in reviewing her death, and that of Cloten, we may easily call to mind the words of Scripture," etc. And of "King Lear" it is observed with great confidence that Shakespeare "*no doubt* intended to mark particularly the afflicting character of children's ingratitude to their parents, and the conduct of Goneril and Regan to each other; *especially* in the former's poisoning the latter, and laying hands on *herself*, we are taught that those who want gratitude towards their parents (who gave them their being, fed them, nurtured them to *man's* estate) will not scruple to commit more barbarous crimes, and easily to forget that by destroying their body they destroy their soul also." And Dr. Ulrici, a very learned and illegible writer, has discovered that in every one of his plays Shakespeare had in view the inculcation of the peculiar sentiments and doctrines of the Christian religion, and considers the "Midsummer Night's Dream" to be a specimen of the lay or amateur sermon. This is what Dr. Ulrici thinks of Shakespeare; but what

what would Shakespeare have thought of Dr. Ulrici? We believe that "*Via*, Goodman Dull," is nearly the remark which the learned professor would have received from the poet to whom his very careful treatise is devoted. And yet, without prying into the Teutonic mysteries, a gentleman of missionary aptitudes might be tempted to remark that in many points Shakespeare is qualified to administer a rebuke to people of the prevalent religion. Meeting a certain religionist is like striking the corner of a wall: he is possessed of a firm and rigid persuasion that you must leave off this and that, stop, cry, be anxious, be advised, and above all things refrain from doing what you like, for nothing is so bad for any one as that. And in quite another quarter of the religious hemisphere we occasionally encounter gentlemen who have most likely studied at the feet of Dr. Ulrici, or at least of an equivalent Gamaliel, and who, when we, or such as we, speaking the language of mortality, remark of a pleasing friend, "Nice fellow, so and so! Good fellow as ever lived!" reply sternly, upon an unsuspecting reviewer, with—"Sir, is he an *earnest* man?" To which, in some cases, we are unable to return a sufficient answer. Yet Shakespeare (differing, in that respect at least, from the disciples of Carlyle), had, we suspect, an objection to grim people, and we fear would have liked the society of Mercutio better than that of a dreary divine, and preferred Ophelia or "that Juliet" to a female philanthropist of sinewy aspect. And, seriously, if this world is not all evil, he who

has understood and painted it best must probably have some good. If the underlying and almighty essence of this world be good, then it is likely that the writer who most deeply approached to that essence will be himself good. There is a religion of week-days as well as of Sundays, of "cakes and ale" * as well as of pews and altar clothes. This England lay before Shakespeare as it lies before us all, with its green fields, and its long hedgerows, and its many trees, and its great towns, and its endless hamlets, and its motley society, and its long history, and its bold exploits, and its gathering power; and he saw that they were good. To him, perhaps, more than to any one else, has it been given to see that they were a great unity, a great religious object; that if you could only descend to the inner life, to the deep things, to the secret principles of its noble vigor, to the essence of character, to what we know of Hamlet and seem to fancy of Ophelia, we might, so far as we are capable of so doing, understand the nature which God has made. Let us, then, think of him not as a teacher of dry dogmas or a sayer of hard sayings, but as

"A priest to us all,
Of the wonder and bloom of the world," †

a teacher of the hearts of men and women; one from which may be learned something of that inmost principle that ever modulates

* *"Twelth Night," III, 2.*
† *Matthew Arnold, "The Youth of Nature."*

"With murmurs of the air,
And motions of the forests and the sea,
And voice of living beings, and woven hymns
*Of night and day, and the deep heart of man"**

We must pause, lest our readers reject us, as the Bishop of Durham, the poor curate, because he was "mystical and confused."

Yet it must be allowed that Shakespeare was worldly; and the proof of it is that he succeeded in the world. Possibly this is the point on which we are most richly indebted to tradition. We see, generally, indeed, in Shakespeare's works, the popular author, the successful dramatist: there is a life and play in his writings rarely to be found except in those who have had habitual good luck, and who, by the tact of experience, feel the minds of their readers at every word, as a good rider feels the mouth of his horse. But it would have been difficult quite to make out whether the profits so accruing had been profitably invested,—whether the genius to create such illusions was accompanied with the care and judgment necessary to put out their proceeds properly in actual life. We could only have said that there was a general impression of entire calmness and equability in his principal works rarely to be found where there is much pain, which usually makes gaps in the work and dislocates the balance of the mind. But, happily here, and here almost alone, we are on sure historical ground. The reverential nature of

* *Shelley*, "*Alastor.*"

Englishmen has carefully preserved what they thought the great excellence of their poet — that he made a fortune.* It is certain that Shakespeare was proprietor of the Globe Theater, that he made money there, and invested the same in land at Stratford-on-Avon; and probably no circumstance in his life ever gave him so much pleasure. It was a great thing that he, the son of the wool-comber, the poacher, the good-for-nothing, the vagabond (for so we fear the phrase went in Shakespeare's youth), should return upon the old scene a substantial man, a person of capital, a freeholder, a gentleman to be respected, and over whom even a burgess could not affect the least superiority. The great pleasure in life is doing what people say you cannot do. Why did Mr. Disraeli take the duties of the Exchequer with so much relish? Because people said he was a novelist, an *ad*

**The only antiquarian thing which can be fairly called an anecdote of Shakespeare is, that Mrs. Alleyne, a shrewd woman in those times, and married to Mr. Alleyne, the founder of Dulwich Hospital, was one day, in the absence of her husband, applied to on some matter by a player who gave a reference to Mr. Hemminge (the "notorious" Mr. Hemminge, the commentators say) and to Mr. Shakespeare of the Globe, and that the latter, when referred to, said, "Yes, certainly, he knew him, and he was a rascal and a good-for-nothing." The proper speech of a substantial man, such as it is worth while to give a reference to. — B.*

captandum man, and—*monstrum horrendum!*—a Jew that could not add up. No doubt it pleased his inmost soul to do the work of the red-tape people better than those who could do nothing else. And so with Shakespeare: it pleased him to be respected, by those whom he had respected with boyish reverence, but who had rejected the imaginative man, on their own ground and in their own subject, by the only title which they would regard—in a word, as a moneyed man. We seem to see him eyeing the burgesses with good-humored fellowship and genial (though suppressed and half-unconscious) contempt, drawing out their old stories and acquiescing in their foolish notions, with everything in his head and easy saying upon his tongue, a full mind, and a deep dark eye that played upon an easy scene; now in fanciful solitude, now in cheerful society; now occupied with deep thoughts, now and equally so with trivial recreations, forgetting the dramatist in the man of substance, and the poet in the happy companion; beloved and even respected, with a hope for every one and a smile for all.

The End



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